

# COOK'S

ILLUSTRATED

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## BAKED ZITI

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*Serves 8 to 10. Published March 1, 2009. From Cook's Illustrated.*

The test kitchen prefers baked ziti made with heavy cream, but whole milk can be substituted by increasing the amount of cornstarch to 2 teaspoons and increasing the cooking time in step 3 by 1 to 2 minutes. Our preferred brand of mozzarella is Dragone Whole Milk Mozzarella. Part-skim mozzarella can also be used, but avoid preshredded cheese, as it does not melt well. For tips on cooking with cottage cheese, see related How To Cook.

### INGREDIENTS

- 1** pound whole milk cottage cheese or 1 percent cottage cheese (see note)
- 2** large eggs , lightly beaten
- 3** ounces grated Parmesan cheese (about 1 1/2 cups)  
Table salt
- 1** pound ziti or other short, tubular pasta
- 2** tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 5** medium garlic cloves , minced or pressed through garlic press (about 5 teaspoons)
- 1** (28-ounce) can tomato sauce
- 1** (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes
- 1** teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/2** cup plus 2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil leaves
- 1** teaspoon sugar  
Ground black pepper
- 3/4** teaspoon cornstarch
- 1** cup heavy cream (see note)
- 8** ounces low-moisture whole-milk mozzarella cheese , cut into 1/4-inch pieces (about 1 1/2 cups) (see note)

### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1.** 1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Whisk cottage cheese, eggs, and 1 cup Parmesan together in medium bowl; set aside. Bring 4 quarts of water to boil in large Dutch oven over high heat. Stir in 1 tablespoon salt and pasta; cook, stirring occasionally, until pasta begins to soften but is not yet cooked through, 5 to 7 minutes. Drain pasta and leave in colander (do not wash Dutch oven).
- 2.** 2. Meanwhile, heat oil and garlic in 12-inch skillet over medium heat until garlic is fragrant but not brown, about 2 minutes. Stir in tomato sauce, diced tomatoes, and oregano; simmer until thickened, about 10 minutes. Off heat, stir in 1/2 cup basil and sugar, then season with salt and pepper.
- 3.** 3. Stir cornstarch into heavy cream in small bowl; transfer mixture to now-empty Dutch oven set over medium heat. Bring to simmer and cook until thickened, 3 to 4 minutes. Remove pot from heat and add cottage cheese mixture, 1 cup tomato sauce, and 3/4 cup mozzarella, then stir to combine. Add pasta and stir to coat thoroughly with sauce.
- 4.** 4. Transfer pasta mixture to 13- by 9-inch baking dish and spread remaining tomato sauce evenly over pasta. Sprinkle remaining 3/4 cup mozzarella and remaining 1/2 cup Parmesan over top. Cover baking dish tightly with foil and bake for 30 minutes.

5. Remove foil and continue to cook until cheese is bubbling and beginning to brown, about 30 minutes longer. Cool for 20 minutes. Sprinkle with remaining 2 tablespoons basil and serve.

### RECIPE TESTING

Baked Ziti Gone Bad



#### **RUBBERY CHEESE:**

Preshredded mozzarella melts into an unappetizing rubbery crust.

#### **DRY, GRAINY SAUCE:**

Ziti absorbs liquid as it cooks, leaving the sauce dry and the ricotta grainy and broken.

#### **MUSHY PASTA:**

Starting the casserole with al dente pasta leads to overcooked, mushy ziti by the time it emerges from the oven.

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**RECIPE TESTING**

Keys to Better Flavor and Texture

**NOT RICOTTA**

Our recipe swaps ricotta for cottage cheese, which maintains its creamy texture even when hot.

**TWO SAUCES**

We combine traditional tomato sauce...



... with nontraditional Alfredo sauce to achieve a perfect balance of brightness and richness.

**DICEY SOLUTION**

Diced mozzarella, stirred into the sauce and sprinkled on top of the dish, leads to melted cheese in every bite.

**TECHNIQUE**

The Right Degree of Al Dente



To ensure perfectly al dente pasta in the finished dish, we boil ziti just until it begins to soften but is not yet cooked through, 5 to 7 minutes—half the time most recipes call for. The pasta continues to cook in the oven, where it absorbs the flavorful sauce. To compensate, we add nearly twice the amount of sauce as in most recipes.

**TEST KITCHEN**

and Cook's Illustrated magazines and is the workday destination for more than three dozen test cooks, editors, and cookware specialists. Our mission is to test recipes until we understand how and why they work and arrive at the best version. We also test kitchen equipment and supermarket ingredients in search of brands that offer the best value and performance. You can watch us work by tuning in to America's Test Kitchen ([www.americastestkitchen.com](http://www.americastestkitchen.com)) on public television.